

The Persecution of the Church 27

Where the populace was fiercely anti-Christian or where the pagan priests were zealous, there the Christians suffered severely. Their churches would be razed to the ground and the prisons would be full. Some of the weaker brethren would recant; others would hide themselves or quit the district; others again would suffer martyrdom. In more fortunate districts, where public opinion was with the Christians, the churches might not be destroyed, though they stood empty and silent.

The fiercest persecution seems to have taken place in Asia Minor. There had been a partial revolt of the troops at Antioch, easily suppressed by the Antiochenes themselves, but Diocletian apparently connected it in some way with the Christians and let his hand fall heavily upon them. Just at this time, moreover, in the neighbouring kingdom of Armenia, Saint Gregory the Illuminator was preaching the gospel with marvellous success, and the Christians of Cappadocia, just over the border, paid the penalty for the uneasiness which this ferment caused to their rulers. We hear, for example, in Phrygia of a whole Christian community being extirpated. Magistrates, senators, and people—Christians all—had taken refuge in their principal church, to which the troops set fire. Eusebius, in his *History of the Church*, paints a lamentable picture of the persecution which he himself witnessed in Palestine and Syria, and, *multis Litteris Constantine*, he says * that even the barbarians across the frontier were so touched by the sufferings of the

Const, i ii., 53.